

Good Godly Grief

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[0 : 00] As Eric mentioned, my name is Bill. I help work with some of the small groups here at St. John's. So if this is your first time here, or you're looking for a way to get connected, I would love to meet you afterwards.

They're also in a lot of the Bibles. This is a new thing, apparently. There's some Connect cards in the front cover. So if you'd like to find a way to get connected to the church, you can drop that Connect card in the offering.

So we're finishing up our series on 2 Corinthians tonight. Now, my wife and I have been in Vancouver about two years. And so when we get visitors who have never been here before, there are different things that we like to do.

One of the things that's really high on our list is taking them up to Queen Elizabeth Park and getting to look out over the whole city. I mean, the view is breathtaking from up there. You can see everything.

But you better not go on a cloudy day, a day where the sky is gray, where there's maybe raining, because then the view is kind of wasted. All you see is gray.

[0 : 59] All you see are clouds. You know the mountains are there, but their beauty is obscured by all the clouds. The mountains haven't changed, but your view has.

Now, as we've been going through 2 Corinthians, Paul has been taking us up to breathtaking views of our reality in Christ. And one of the foremost is, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

But often in our lives, clouds come in. We don't see this view. Things get in the way. Our sin, our flaws, our weakness get in the way of seeing our true reality in Christ.

The mountain doesn't change. Only our view does. Instead of seeing ourselves as being forgiven and loved, we feel alone and guilty.

Instead of seeing others as new creations, we see them as their flaws. So in our passage tonight, Paul challenges us to see the mountain, not the clouds.

[2 : 07] Even on cloudy days, to see with eyes of faith. To remember that in Christ, you and I are not the sin we can't shake. We're not the weaknesses we see in ourselves.

We are a new creation. Paul's going to do this by telling the Corinthians a story they already know. The story is how, when Paul confronted them, it led to grief.

And the grief led to repentance. And the repentance led to joy. They know this story, but Paul is a good pastor. And Paul wants to make sure they know what really happened.

What the real story was. How God was really working in their midst. He wants to affirm to the Corinthians that even in their sin, that they're the mountain, not the clouds.

So, background here. If you read this story, you kind of jump into it. And you kind of have, alright, there's a back story. What's going on? What's happening here?

[3 : 08] So here's the basic gist of it. We don't have all the details, but here's the basic idea. Is the last time Paul was in Corinth, that there was someone who opposed him to his face.

And instead of the church kind of backing him up and saying, you know, yeah, Paul's right. You know, dude, get away. They just stood passively by. They let the person kind of defraud him and go against him.

And they did nothing. And acted like they implicitly agreed with this guy. Now, imagine if you're in Paul's shoes. You daily put your life and reputation on the line for the gospel.

That you spent 18 months living with these people. Teaching them about who God is. And showing them with your life. That you even refused financial support so that they wouldn't confuse you for a false teacher.

You led them to Christ. You loved them like children and taught them like a father. And then all of a sudden, one guy comes in and they treat you like a dime a dozen traveling salesmen.

[4 : 17] What's up with that? So Paul left. Paul left and went back to Ephesus. Then he sent Titus with a severe letter to take them to tell them what happened.

You can probably imagine this conversation. Paul's like, hey guys, who wants to see the world? I have this great destination. You can go see the wonderful city of Corinth. You know, all of its temples and all of its roads and everything.

Just go see. You know, the only thing you have to do though is there's this congregation that's a little bit tricky. You might have to give them a letter. You might have to confront them. Yeah, I don't think there are probably lots of people who are volunteering for that mission.

But Paul sends Titus to take them a letter. And Paul says it's a letter of tears. It's a severe letter. And so what happens from what we can tell is that Titus arrives, reads the letter, and best case scenario happens.

Is that they experience godly grief that leads to repentance. And Titus leaves with huge amounts of joy. That the church admits its mistake, takes action, and then reaffirms their deep love for Paul.

[5 : 22] Saying, we do really love you, Paul. So, Paul meets Titus there later. And then when they meet up, that Paul is carrying tons of weight and anxiety and nervousness about what's going to happen to these people that he loves.

And Titus comes along, and Titus tells them the good news. And immediately Paul is overwhelmed with joy as well. And then, then what happens is now kind of we're in the middle of our story.

Is that Paul then writes a letter back to the Corinthians. So he's probably only a couple weeks away from seeing them face to face. But he wants to write because he's a good pastor.

And he wants to make sure they know what really happened. That they make sure that they really know how God was working. So, got all that? All clear? The basic Cliff Notes version is that Paul goes from mad to sad to glad.

And the Corinthians go from bad to sad to glad. So, as long as you have that, you should be set for the passage. And like I said, that Paul's writing as a pastor.

[6 : 26] He wants to show them how God was at work. And here's the key for Paul. Is that godly grief produced godly repentance, which produced godly joy.

Godly grief produced godly repentance that produced godly joy. And I think what Paul wants to say applies deeply to us as well. Because for many of us, we experience the cloud in our life.

We experience either seeing ourselves or seeing others with sin in the way. And Paul's calling us past that to look to the mountain. This is the gospel way.

The path to joy. So, godly grief. Paul first talks about the difference between godly grief and worldly grief. Look down at verse 10. Godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret.

Whereas worldly grief produces death. To say it in another way, that grieving over our sin in a godly way produces repentance and eternal life.

[7 : 28] But grieving over our sin in a natural way, a way that seems right to us, leads to condemnation and death. So, worldly grief comes from breaking a law. From failing to meet an objective standard.

That the worldly grief condemns. There's a standard, and you missed it. And that leads to grief. But godly grief is completely different. Godly grief doesn't look at the law.

It looks at actually offending a holy God. That rather than godly grief saying, I've violated an objective principle, godly grief says, I have defied a holy and loving God.

And it definitely changes the way that you feel and approach things. Here's an illustration. Let's say you get pulled over for speeding. So, you know you're speeding. You get the ticket.

Like, of course you're going to be upset about it. You've got a speeding ticket. You have to pay a fine. But there's a law, and no amount of sorrow or remorse is going to change that. Actually, trying to do that is called bribery.

[8 : 30] And that's also illegal. You can't do that. There's a law. You broke it. Here are the consequences. You're going to experience worldly grief. But let's change the analogy a little bit. Let's say you're a teenager, and you get pulled over for speeding.

And to make the matters worse, you recognize when the cop is walking to your window, the walk is very familiar. Because the walk is actually your dad, who is the one who bought the car, who pays for the gas, and who told you that you were fine to drive the car as long as you were safe and didn't break any rules.

So, again, why you'd be speeding if your dad's a cop, I don't know. But just stick with the analogy here. The point of that is that the speeding ticket is not your biggest issue. In that case, the biggest issue is your relationship to your father.

That you have directly defied him. And that's going to lead to a different kind of grief. And that's what Paul's getting at when he's talking about what godly grief is. It's different because of who you offended, who you've defied.

The one who made you, who knows you, who loves you. But godly grief presses in deeply to the character of God and doesn't just see his perfect standard, but sees God's forgiveness.

[9 : 48] As Paul said earlier in the letter, Through Christ, God has reconciled us to himself, not counting our sins against us. He made him, Jesus, to be sin, who knew no sin, that we might be made righteous.

So godly grief looks to Christ and not the law. Godly grief recognizes that our sin is actually far worse than we realized, but that we are also far more loved than we realized as well.

Godly grief is gospel grief. Godly grief admits that there's nothing we can do for our sin, but we have to look to Christ. That Jesus has paid it all for me, for you, and for anyone.

So this is exactly what Paul says the Corinthians did. That his letter, his strong, his severe letter, drove them to Christ and led to godly grief. And because they were led to godly grief, that that produced godly repentance.

So point two, godly repentance. What is it and what does it mean for us? So Paul sees godly grief as being completely natural.

[10 : 58] Apple trees produce apples. Pear trees produce pears. Godly grief produces godly repentance. And so, and this makes sense.

When we really see our sin in light of Christ, we see the wickedness of our own hearts, but the incredible sweetness of God's love, we can't help but respond in freedom. We can't help but realize that he's taken all of it, and that we get to respond in love.

That we're no longer bound by sin. That we're no longer under this objective law taskmaster that says, you were always wrong. But we see that in Christ that we're free, and that God loves us, and that we can move to God because of that.

And so, naturally, we want to make things right. And this is what the Corinthians do. Look at verse 11. Paul says, That is, everything you've done has made it like the wrong never took place to begin with.

Paul's saying to the Corinthians, We are fully restored now. Earlier in the book, he talked about how he'd forgiven them, and now he's saying that your repentance has restored our relationship.

[12 : 19] So, grief, godly grief naturally produces godly repentance. But, as we mentioned before, Paul's a good pastor. He doesn't just want to tell them this is what happens. He wants to tell them why.

He wants to tell them what was going on. So, look down at verse 12. He says, When I wrote to you, it was not for the sake of the one who did the wrong. That is, Paul's saying, I'm not writing to you guys just to call somebody out.

And he's not saying, And then he says, Nor for the sake of the one who suffered the wrong, which was him. He's not saying, Look guys, this is all about me. I'm just telling you how bad I felt from what you did. He says that he's writing, In order that their earnestness, that your earnestness, for us, might be revealed to you in the sight of God.

Paul wrote, Paul wrote, Paul wrote, Paul wrote, Paul wrote, Paul could see clearly, that though this sin was in the way, though there were clouds, that who they were in Christ was eternal.

And as Paul wants them to see that too. Paul's not the first person to do this. We get a similar picture from how Jesus confronted Peter, in the end of John, in a familiar story.

[13 : 37] Maybe you remember it. Peter, do you love me more than these? Yes, Lord, you know that I love you. Peter, do you love me?

Yes, Lord, you know that I love you. Peter, do you love me? It says that Peter was grieved, because he said to him the third time, do you love me?

And he said to him, Lord, you know everything. You know, that I love you. After that, Jesus said to Peter, follow me.

When you read this story, it seems like, at the beginning, that Jesus knows that Peter loves Jesus. But, Peter doesn't know, that Peter loves Jesus. And Jesus asked him three times, to evoke that out of him, for him to see, like, yes, this really is who I am.

I am the man who loves Jesus. That I am a person who's in Christ. And I think Paul's doing the same thing with the Corinthians. He wants them to see, that this is who they really are.

[14 : 40] They are people who love Jesus, who love his kingdom, and who love Paul. That they are not the sin that was before them. They are people who love God, and love Paul. That they aren't the clouds, they're the mountain.

So, in both cases, the confrontation brought godly grief, and godly repentance, because it focused on godly, true identity. And, the implications, I think, for this are profound.

I wanted to mention two of them. One of them, from the side of things, being that, as people, we don't like correction. We don't like confrontation. I don't think anyone wakes up in the morning, and says, you know what, I hope someone confronts me, as soon as I go to work today.

Or, I hope someone tells me, you know, that this is wrong in my life. We don't like that. But, the Bible says again, and again, and again, that the wise people love rebuke. That they gladly hear words, of correction.

Because, the godly wise people know, that they're not perfect. That they're looking to be shaped, to be more like Christ. So, will we be people, who are open, to correction?

[15 : 48] Who are open, to criticism? Or, are we going to be people, who put walls up, that attack anyone, who comes near, and tries to get within the walls? Second, let's look at it, from the other side.

Confrontation, is not easy. Confrontation, is really hard. But, anytime we do confront people, that, and you know this feeling, I know this feeling, there's a tendency, to make it all about us.

To say, well, this is how you hurt me, this is what you did wrong, this is, this is how I was inconvenienced. If I were you, I would have done it this way. I've realized, that all of those starting points, are very bad, in marriage.

So, free marriage advice, don't start with those things. Yeah. But, the bottom line, here, I think, is that, as Paul pointed, the Corinthians, to Christ, and said, this is what you need to see.

You need to see Christ. It's not about how you hurt me. It's about, that you are in Christ, and, this is your true identity. And, I want, I'm revealing what you did wrong, so that you will be even more certain, and secure, and content, in this identity.

[17 : 00] Since Paul did that, I think, if we're ever confronting people, which the Bible says, that we should, that, it's essential, that we desire, to push people to Christ, is that our primary attitude, and desire, is for them, to know Jesus more, to see their true identity, to follow the example, of Paul in that, and to make sure, that not just, that our motives are right, but even that we're engaging, in a process, that helps push people, towards that end.

We're not just lashing out, at people, because they've done something wrong, but they were creatively, and prayerfully, thinking of ways, to engage, that they might see Christ, that we might see the mountain, and not just the clouds.

And Paul said, Paul gives us the motivation for this, because it leads to joy. So for point three, godly joy, we've seen how, godly grief, leads to godly repentance, leads to godly joy.

And this is the motivation for it all, that there would be joy, restored relationships, and delight. Think about your closest friendships. I bet it's probably similar to me.

When I think about the people, that I'm absolutely closest to, I think about people, I've had conflict with. I think about people, that I've had to work through, hard things with. I think about people, who have either wronged me, or I've wronged them, or maybe we've had one big, wronging each other party.

[18 : 25] But it's because, of working through those things, of working through conflict, that the relationship, is deeper, and closer. That because, in looking at each other, we had to look through the clouds, and grab a hold of the mountain, that was on the other end of it.

That because we had to see the mountain, and not the clouds, because we had to pursue that together, that it brought, a deeper intimacy, and fellowship together. And it's joy, it's joy, and delighting, when people are brought together.

One of my, so since we're, since Ben's given us permission, to talk about Christmas, my favorite Christmas movie, is It's a Wonderful Life. And in It's a Wonderful Life, at the end, that Jimmy Stewart comes back, after repenting, and changing, kind of his whole orientation, and is filled with delight, and joy.

Like, it reconnects him with his kids, with his wife, and with all the people, who are in the house. There is, just joy, and delight, that bubbles up, from the environment, because he's seen his wrong, and he's turned from it.

And it produces godly joy. I think our churches, can be similar places. Where we see, because, that we've experienced, godly grief, that's led to godly repentance, that now brings godly joy, that it would overflow, into the lives of others.

[19 : 40] This is what Paul says, in verse 13. He says, we rejoice still more, at the joy of Titus, because his spirit, had been refreshed, by you all. So the Corinthian joy, became Titus's joy, which became, Paul's joy.

So in closing, I want to remind us, that one day, that the clouds, will be gone forever. That one day, that we will see each other, as we truly are, and that we will see Christ, as he truly is.

But until then, we have choices. Will we acknowledge, that ourselves, and our communities, are imperfect? And will we choose, to celebrate signs, of God's work, and be joyful about that?

Or will we just lament, that everything is not, quite perfect? Will we be marked, by forgiveness, and reconciliation, that leads to joy? Will we trust, that godly grief, does actually produce, godly repentance, that does produce, godly and great joy?

And will we look, to see the mountain, in each other, with eyes of faith, and hope, and love? May this be, the kind of community, that we get to be a part of.

[20 : 49] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.